

The John Coward House

HABS-NJ-555

Near Prospertown RED VALLEY

Upper Freehold Township, Monmouth County, New Jersey

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13-REDVA.V.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of New Jersey

Historic American Buildings Survey
Seymour Williams, F.A.I.A., District Officer
133 Central Avenue, Rahway, New Jersey

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The John Coward House
Near Prospertown
Upper Freehold Township, Monmouth County, New Jersey

Owner: Mrs. Lillian Malsbury

Date of Erection: In or before 1750

Architect: Unknown

Builder: The Reverend John Coward, died July 1760,
original owner

Present Condition: Original, except for window sash,
mantels of closed fireplaces reshingling of
three elevations and roof

Number of Stories: Two and one-half, and cellar in
main unit; one and one-half and no cellar
in minor unit

Materials of Construction:

Foundation - stone masonry

Exterior walls - timber frame, brick filled,
covered with rounded-butt wood shingles
where not replaced by modern ones

Interior walls - frame partitions plastered
Chimneys - brick, built into inside of gable
end walls

Roof - gable, wood shingled

Historical Data:

The identification of this house and its
original owner has been found possible by search of
title in the County and Province records, reported as
follows:

By a deed of 28 November 1750, John Lawrence
of Upper Freehold Township, Monmouth County, conveyed

to John Coward^(a) of same place, for 37 pounds a 200 acre tract there on the north side of Lahaway Brook, "with the appurtenances thereto belonging", the mines and minerals being excepted, reciting grantor's title from James Alexander by a survey dated 28 May 1750. Evidently the grantee built the house soon after that year, if he was not already living on the farm as tenant.

(a) John Coward's name appears in the records of the Baptist Church at Middletown in a list of members living "in the County of Monmouth and places adjacent in East New Jersey" dated 1st of March 1731-2. In the same records under dates of 10 May 1755 et seq., is an account of John Coward complaining to the church meeting that Thomas Cox "reflected much on said Coward on account of his preaching and should be glad if he preached no more"; and 30 September 1758 "at Crosswicks Meeting", "Mr. Coward" was suspended from communion for other cause. (Records publ. in J.E. Stillwell, Historical and Genealogical Miscellany, Vol. 2m pp. 257-268). The members who resided in the western part of Monmouth County and parts adjacent in Burlington, had erected in 1751 Crosswicks meeting house as being more convenient and in 1766 withdrew from the parent meeting at Middletown. John Coward was the licensed preacher mentioned above (F. Ellis, History of Monm. Co. 1885, p. 635). In the list of all taxable persons in Upper Freehold Twp., 1758, appear the names of Joseph Coward 50 A, John Coward 1200 A. and John Coward Jr. 415 A. (Ibid. 614). He was described as residing in that township in the deed of 1750 cited above, but for how long a time before that year has not been ascertained. Possibly he had leased the land for some years before purchase and built the house earlier than 1750.

John Coward⁽⁴⁾, the grantee abovenamed, being still of Upper Freehold, devised (by will* dated 12 June and proved 12 September 1760) to his son Thomas Coward part of the plantation, describing this as "Beginning at a stone standing on the north side of Burlington Path (the Mt. Holly-Freehold highway), being a corner between James Holmes and John Coward Jr., thence running a course that may fall five chains below the bridge that crosses long bog brook to a stone in said brook; thence running a straight course to where Andrew Race's run empties itself into Lahawa brook, and so to continue the same course to the end of my land, bounded westwardly by my son Jonathan Coward's land, southerly by the poins (sic), easterly by the abovesaid lines, northwardly in part by my son John and part by Joseph's land."

(b) The Rev. John Coward died 30 July 1760, and Alice his wife 30 October 1766, according to grave-stone inscriptions in the Yellow Meeting House burial ground near Cream Ridge, westward of his house here surveyed. He is said to have been son of Capt. Hugh Coward who married in 1703 Patience, a daughter of John and Alice (Stout) Throckmorton, of Middletown. He married Alice Brittain, daughter of Abram, and had issue: John 1728-1777, Joseph 1729-29, Joseph 1731-1798, Thomas 1732-36, Samuel 1734-1759, Alice 1736-1810 wife of John Brown, Deliverance 1737-1787 wife of James Fitz Randolph, Patience 1740 wife of Nathl. Secrs, Jacob Blackwell and Thos. Rogers, Rebecca 1742-1815, wife of Tobias Hendrickson, Thomas 14 April 1746- 10 Jan. 1775 (the grantor of the homestead farm in 1770 as above cited), Elizabeth 1746 - wife of Thos. Sill, Jonathan 1748-1833. (Abstract from pedigree of Coward publ. 1914 in John E. Stillweel's Historical and Genealogical Miscellany, Vol. 2, p. 331 and Vol. 3, pp. 165 and 475, etc.)

*A brief abstract of this appears publ. in N.J. Archives, XXXII, 74.

Thomas Coward, the son and devisee of the homestead as above cited, being likewise of Upper Freehold, gave his deed of 1st October 1770, conveying to Gilbert Smith of same place, for 1200 pounds 200 acres of the same, "with all and singular the Houses, outhouses, barns, stables, gardens", etc. reciting his father's will abovesaid. (See note "b").

Gilbert Smith the grantee, being of Upper Freehold and supposedly occupying this house devised by his will of 21 May 1807 (proved 25 January 1809) to "my son Richard Smith my plantation and two tracts of pine land and all the remainder of my real estate.

Richard Smith, the son and devisee, held the farm and being likewise of Upper Freehold, in turn devised by his will of 29 April 1832 (proved 19 May following) to his son Joseph S. Smith "all my homestead plantation" there, "said to contain 200 acres, be the same more or less, with all the buildings thereon".

Ann Smith, widow of said Richard Smith, evidently came into possession of 100 acres of the farm, for she conveyed that tract to John Bilyeu and wife Margaret, all the parties being of Upper Freehold, by her deed of 13 August 1846 for \$5000, "with all and singulr the buildings, improvements," etc., without reciting her title to the same.

On 5 October 1852, Charles Smith, Peter Bilyeu Jr. and wife Emma, all of Mercer County, heirs of Joseph Smith deceased, gave their deed releasing to the John M. Bilyeu of Upper Freehold, the same 100 acre farm conveyed to him as above cited.

This grantee being of Cream Ridge, a village just west of the farm here considered, devised the balance of his estate to his son Richard Bilyeu by will dated 7 January 1882, and proved 16 September in same year.

The present owner, Mrs. Lillian Malsbury, advises us that she as only child of said Richard Bilyeu obtained the farm by law of descent.

Bibliography:

A search of title in Land and Probate records of Monmouth County by Forrest N. Hargrove, H.A.B.S. abstractor, and in those of the Provincial Secretary, now filed in the State House, by Oscar F. Benjamin, research editor, as reported 2 May 1940

Lewis D. Cook
Supervising Historian

Approved:

Seymour Williams
SEYMOUR WILLIAMS, F.A.I.A.
District Officer

W 10/2/40